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# S E R M O N

Præached before His MAJESTY's  
HIGH COMMISSIONER, at the open-  
ing of the General Assembly of the  
CHURCH of SCOTLAND 1758.

S. T. R. M. O. N.

Interacted before His MAJESTY'S  
High Commission, at the open-  
ing of the General Assembly of the  
Church of SCOTLAND 1783.



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THE  
WISDOM OF GOD  
IN THE  
GOSPEL REVELATION.

  
S E R M O N,

Preached at the opening of the GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY of the Church of Scot-  
LAND, in *May* 1758.

By Dr. WILLIAM LEECHMAN,  
Professor of Divinity in the University of GLASGOW.

E D I N B U R G H.

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Reached at the opening of the GENERAL

Professor of History in the University of Glasgow  
By Dr. WILLIAM LEITCHMAN

Е. Д. Л. Н. В. У. Р. О. М.

1914 has been a year of great change

ADOLF H.

TO  
HIS GRACE  
CHARLES Lord CATHCART,  
HIS MAJESTY'S HIGH-COMMISSIONER  
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
CHURCH OF *SCOTLAND*;

The following Sermon is,  
with the greatest Respect, inscribed

By

His Grace's

much obliged,

and most obedient

Humble Servant.

WILLIAM LEECHMAN.

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THE  
W I S D O M  
OF THE  
REVELATION of the GOSPEL.

I CORINTH. i. 21.

*For after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

WE learn from this Chapter, and several other places of the New Testament, that the Jews and Gentiles urged different objections against Christianity, arising from their respective characters and prejudices. The Learned among the Gentiles (to whom the Apostle's discourse here refers) entertained very lofty notions of the excellency of their philosophy, and of the noble effects it was capable of producing. According to their views, it was the only corrector of ignorance and vice, and the only conductor to truth and virtue: It alone formed great and good men: It afforded the only true means of enlightening and re-

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forming

forming the world. In their opinion, it was excellent not only upon account of the matter, but also of the manner. They admired the accuracy and strength of its reasonings, and the beauty and elegance of the expressions. On these accounts, they bestowed on it the honourable appellation of *Wisdom*, and from the force of these prejudices in favour of it, they accounted the Gospel foolishness, because unlike to it in all respects.

The method which the Gospel proposed, of instructing and reforming the world by faith, and not by philosophical theories, by illiterate fishermen and not by learned philosophers, was in their view a very foolish one, and which must in the event prove unsuccessful. They despised too the plain and artless simplicity of the stile of the Gospel, when compared with their laboured compositions and studied eloquence. The Apostle assuming it as a certain principle, That the true knowledge of God, was the best foundation on which real religion and virtue, and the most valuable reformation and improvements among mankind, could be built, replies to the objections of the Gentiles in the words of the text. *For after that, in the wisdom of God (i. e. in the mysterious counsels of the Divine Will,) the World by wisdom (i. e. by their own reason and philosophy) knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

In which words, there are two main assertions. *First*, That the much admired wisdom of the philosophers failed in a very essential point, the leading the world to the true knowledge of God.

*Secondly*, That the doctrine of the Gospel, which they contemned, is ordained in the wisdom of God to be the effectual means of enlightening and saving those who believe it.



All that is further intended at present, is to offer some observations for the illustration or confirmation of the Apostle's two assertions; and then, if time will allow, to point out some of the practical instructions, (suited to the occasion of our meeting) arising from what shall be said.

I. The first assertion is, That *The World by Wisdom knew not God.*

As the Apostle was a man of unquestionable integrity, and had the best opportunities of being fully acquainted with the state of the Heathen world, his testimony, as to this charge of ignorance against it, might safely be relied upon. But there is no need of resting the evidence of it upon his testimony, however venerable and worthy of credit in all respects. Every one who is acquainted with the history of the antient world, must acknowledge, that for many ages before Christ it affords the most incontestable proofs from fact, that the great body of mankind had not that true knowledge of God which did or could direct them to purity either of manners or of worship. It is true, that the greatest part of the Philosophers acknowledged one Supreme God; but they taught at the same time, and with the same sincerity, the doctrine of many subordinate Deities, to whom worship was to be given; and, which is still worse, some of these inferior Gods, in the opinion of the people, and even of some of the Philosophers themselves, were of the most wicked and immoral characters imaginable. Some of them were lewd and intemperate; others were envious and malignant, or fierce and cruel, real *Demons* in the worst sense of the word. This distinction of good and evil Deities, was acknowledged in all Heathen nations, and the bad ones were worshipped not only with rites, but with actions correspondent to their characters.

characters. Hence not only prayers to kindle the fire of impure love, but prostitutions were authorised acts of religion in honour of certain deities. Hence the barbarous combats of gladiators, to appease the ghosts of the deceased, and human sacrifices to render the gods of cruel dispositions propitious. Hence too the prevailing practice of magical rites and ceremonies, and some of them of the most horrid and shocking kind, by which the worshippers of the *Genii* and *Demons* pretended to maintain communion with them, and even to have the power of compelling them to do whatever they desired. There is abundant evidence from antient history, that not only the vulgar, but learned Philosophers and great Emperors, were addicted, almost to madness, to these absurd or abominable magical charms and operations. Thus vice was recommended to the imitation of the worshippers by the immoral characters of the Gods, and the foundations of Polytheism and Idolatry were laid upon Philosophical principles. It was the natural consequence of this state of things, that a Supreme Deity, tho' acknowledged in speculation, would not be regarded and glorified as God, either in common life, or in the exercises of religion. The homage and devotion due to him was intercepted by the perpetual attention to the surprising variety of sacrifices and other sacred rites prescribed to be performed to vast multitudes of false and imaginary deities. And in all these numberless acts of worship to them, there was little of any ultimate reference to the Supreme Deity enjoined in their Theological or Philosophical theories, and in the common practice there was none at all: So that the Sovereign God, tho' acknowledged in theory, was entirely forgotten, and neglected in the forms of religion. To which it may be added, that the conceptions

conceptions the generality of the Heathen world had formed of the character and moral government of the Supreme Deity, were so erroneous or defective, or so unsettled and fluctuating, that they could not have any steady effect to promote virtuous practice in the common train of life, or to administer solid consolation in the seasons of distress, or in the hour of death.

In justice to the Heathen world, it must be owned, that many of the Philosophers, and men of education, discerned the immorality and absurdity of the fabulous stories of the Poets concerning the Gods, condemned the literal sense of them as false and impious, and earnestly wished that some reformation had been made on the established religion as to these points: But, at the same time, they maintained the essential principles of Polytheism, on which the whole system of Idolatry and Superstition was founded. A few particular Philosophers, or perhaps the whole sect of the Epicureans, threw off intirely the common doctrines of Polytheism, and ran into the contrary extreme of Atheism and Impiety. But all these Philosophers, who retained any grave and serious sense of things, uniformly taught the doctrine of Subordinate Deities, and of the worship due to them. If the time allotted for this discourse, or the nature of it, would permit us to take a survey of the Philosophers from their first appearance in Greece, about five hundred years before our Saviour, till their reputation and influence intirely sunk about five hundred years after him, it might be shown, that during the whole course of that long period, they were so far from correcting the genius and spirit of Paganism, that they rather encouraged and promoted it both by their principles and practice. And particularly it would appear, that after Christianity began visibly



visibly to gain ground on the antient religion, the Philosophers were the most zealous protectors of it, even to the degree, of bigotry and violent persecution of all who opposed it. So that the Apostle's assertion, That *the world by wisdom knew not God*, holds true, not only as to the vulgar, but as to the learned Philosophers themselves. Some learned men have endeavoured to prove, that the unity of God was taught, and the errors of Polytheism were detected, in those sacred mysteries of the Heathens, into which select persons only were initiated. Tho' this should be supposed to be true, it will not invalidate the Apostle's assertion, That *the world by wisdom knew not God*. For it must be acknowledged, that it cannot be much to the honour of the Institutors or Directors of the mysterious rites, to shut out the greatest part of mankind from the knowledge of the most important truths, and to communicate it only to a few, under the seal of the most impenetrable secrecy. It certainly discovers a more benevolent, a more disinterested and noble spirit in the Founders of the Jewish and Christian religion, to promulgate the truth to all mankind. But whether the unity of Deity was taught in the mysteries at all, or, at least, whether it was taught in any other sense than was generally done by the Philosophers, may be doubted. For it is highly improbable, that the errors of Polytheism, or, at least, all the errors of Polytheism, were detected in these sacred rites. That the Initiated persevered in the belief and in the worship of a plurality of Gods, seems to be manifest beyond all grounds of doubt. It is a most undeniable fact, that a \* sect of Philosophers, numerous, powerful and flourishing

\* Latter Platonists. Julian the Emperor, tho' an adorer of the mysteries, according to the testimony of a Heathen Historian an admirer of his character, continued to believe in as many Gods as the Poets had described.

flourishing for several centuries, who were great admirers of the mysteries, and most zealous to be admitted into them, were at the same time the warmest supporters of Polytheism, and all its attendant superstitions.

It is not intended, in what has been said, to depreciate the whole antient philosophy, but only to show that the Apostle's assertion is confirmed by undoubted facts. It is but just to own, that the writings of the Philosophers contain many excellent truths and fine sentiments, and precepts both of the moral and devout kind, which are very worthy of the serious attention and perusal of Christians. It is matter of just regret, that there was no proper method of propagating these pious and moral instructions among the people in Heathen countries, and that, tho' there had been, they could not have had much influence upon their minds, engrossed, darkened and corrupted with the lowest and most abominable superstitions. It may be justly doubted, if even the \* men of learning and education were able to protect themselves from the corrupting influence of the low and immoral characters of the Gods whom they thought themselves bound to worship.

It may be further considered as a strong presumption of the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that as those of mankind before Christ, who were left to their own wisdom, did not attain to the true knowledge of God; in like manner, those who have derived no light from him since that time, have been

\* It is observed of the Emperor Julian (commonly called the *Apostate*) that, tho' he was celebrated for personal chastity and severity of manners, yet he kept swarms of prostitutes and debauchees publicly about his Court, and even near his person, in the time of public ceremonies. There has been no other account given of this inconsistency, but that he thought himself obliged to shew them respect, and do them honour, as persons consecrated to the Goddess Venus, and other Deities of the like character.

and are still in the same state of darkness, as to this great foundation of all religious knowledge. Our blessed Saviour declared, Matth. xi. 27. *That no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* This may be considered as a prediction: And in this view it has been sufficiently verified by the event. It cannot be shown, that during all the long period since the first appearance of Christianity, any one kingdom, great or small, any one city, village or community, has attained to just notions of the Divine Perfections, to comfortable views of Divine Providence, to purity of worship, to a perfect system of morals, or to steady hopes of immortality, without the aid of Gospel-light. Surely the experience of near four thousand years, must be admitted as a satisfactory proof, if not of the insufficiency, at least of the unsuccessfulness of human reason, in matters of religion.

As to the abstract questions, how far the powers of the human mind could go in finding out the truths of religion; either how far one man, who exercises his reason to the best advantage, could go; or how far the joint inquiries of a society of men taking the advantage of the observations and discoveries of their predecessors, could carry their researches; it is very difficult, and no way material, to resolve them. The only question of real importance is concerning the fact, namely, Whether, notwithstanding the vast powers of the human mind discovered by great improvements, made in many beneficial branches of knowledge, such as Geometry, Astronomy, Legislation, Morals and Arts, yet mankind did not still continue in such a deplorable state of darkness with regard to religious knowledge, as rendered the revelation of the Gospel absolutely necessary



necessary to accomplish the gracious designs of Providence, and as affords the highest ground of thankfulness, for Jesus Christ, the unspeakable gift of God? Every candid person who is acquainted with the state of religion in the Heathen world, even in its most enlightned times, will be at no loss how to answer this question.

It is not intended to enter into the examination of the speculative question, How far the light of nature can go. It may not perhaps be improper, to offer some general observations relating to it.

In the first place, let it be observed, That we cannot certainly conclude from what the Philosophers have actually taught, that so far the unaided light of Reason has gone, because we find some of the oldest and best Philosophers acknowledging, that they did not investigate some of their most important Doctrines, but received them from antient Traditions. It may further deserve our attention, that these first sages, who were not so puffed up with conceited notions of the power of their own reason, as to reject all traditional opinions, spoke frequently more justly and more worthily of Deity and Providence, and with less hesitation of a future state, than their Successors, whose pride of understanding made them depend solely on the strength of their own reasoning.

It is still further observable, that we find these more antient Philosophers expressing sometimes in very pathetic terms, a deep sense of the uncertainty of their own reasonings, and of their need of a better guide. Nay, sometimes they discover ardent wishes at least, if not some faint expectations of a Divine Instructor. These things are strong presumptions, that some of the best doctrines of antient Philosophy, were rather derived from old traditions

which were long held venerable, than found out by Philosophical disquisitions.

Again, let us further consider, that it is no easy matter, to us who dwell in the midst of light, even to form a conception of the obscurity, confusion and uncertainty, which may have perplexed the thoughts of the most knowing men in the ages of darkness. When we reflect upon the disadvantages of their situation, we may see ground to conclude, that it required greater efforts of reasoning than we are apt upon first thoughts to imagine, to ascertain even some points which are commonly look'd upon as very obvious. For instance, the great fundamental doctrine of the Unity of God is commonly considered as extremely plain and evident, even from reason. But to judge with more fairness of the obviousness of the evidence for it, let us candidly attend to the arguments which the most approved modern reasoners employ to establish it. They use two sorts of arguments, namely, Metaphysical ones, and others taken from the unity of design every where apparent in the constitution of the universe, and in the structure of particular beings. The first kind of arguments, it will be admitted, are too abstracted and refined to produce a firm conviction, or indeed any conviction at all in the minds of the generality of mankind; and the second sort of them could not have any great or general effect in the earlier ages of the world, before Philosophy was cultivated, and the system of the universe inquired into. And even after Philosophy is advanced to a considerable degree of perfection, few enter so deeply into Philosophical discoveries as to feel the whole force of arguments drawn from them. Perhaps one would not err much who should assert, that the Belief of one Supreme Deity, so far as it did prevail in the Heathen world, was rather

ther owing to some antient traditions on the point, or to a supposed resemblance betwixt human governments, and the government of the universe, than to any solid and convincing arguments drawn from the depths of Philosophy. It might in like manner be shown, after all that Philosophy in its highest state of improvement has been able to suggest in proof of other points of the utmost importance, better and more satisfactory evidence, and more adapted to the capacity and situation of the greatest part of mankind are still wanting and earnestly wished for, by every one who retains a serious and devout sense of his present state of darkness, imperfection and mortality. — That we may see whether the Gospel affords any grounds of satisfaction, with regard to points of great importance to the peace of the human mind, or any grounds more level to every capacity; let us proceed to consider the Apostle's second assertion in the text.

II. We now proceed to the second assertion of the Apostle in the text. *It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe*: This assertion implies principally three things. *First*, That the scheme of salvation thro' faith in the revelation of the gospel, is a wise one. *Secondly*, That it is an effectual one. And *Thirdly*, That the execution of it is a chief object of Divine Providence. Let us consider each of these in their order.

As to the *first*, The Apostle indeed, in the language of the conceited pretenders to wisdom in those days, calls it foolishness; yet at the same time he plainly intimates, that what they called foolishness, was in reality the most perfect wisdom; and in the verses following the text, he expressly calls it the Wisdom of God. It must be obvious at first sight, that the exhibition



hibition of the wisdom of this scheme in the most extensive view of it, as laid before the foundation of the world, and as carried on in a continued progress, and an amazing variety of steps from the first apostacy till the restitution of all things, is an undertaking to which none of the sons of men are equal. The full display of the beauty and marvelous wisdom of it in its wonderful contrivance, and wonderful execution from the beginning, to its final accomplishment, must be reserved for a fund of everlasting entertainment in the regions of perfect knowledge. It is our duty, in our present state, to contemplate the obvious and striking wisdom of those great lines of it, which are clearly revealed, and are easily comprehended. Every one knows, that wisdom consists in chusing the most proper means to accomplish the best ends. The great end proposed by the Gospel Revelation, is the deliverance of mankind from a state of darkness, corruption and guilt, and raising them to a state of light, purity and favour with God.

Whether we consider, *First*, The matter of this revelation, or *Secondly*, The method of communicating it, and confirming its truth, we shall discern all possible marks of the highest wisdom. *First*, The matter of this revelation, may be summed up under the two heads of doctrines and precepts. With regard to the doctrines, let it be observed, that it is not the intention of them to instruct us in the knowledge of every thing that may be really useful to us with respect to the interests of this present life, far less of every thing which from curiosity we may have a mighty desire to know. The Gospel Revelation considers mankind in their highest capacity, as the rational and accountable subjects of God, and as capable both of present and future happiness or misery according to their behaviour : And

it is the chief, if not the sole design of it, to give us these views and impressions of our nature, of our state, of the perfections, the counsels, the laws, and the government of God, which under the influence of Divine grace are the immediate means of the purity, of the comfort, and of the moral order and perfection of our souls. As we are corrupted and disordered, our natures are incapable of their true happiness till they are purified and restored to order. As we are guilty and mortal creatures, we can have no true consolation without the hopes of pardon, and immortality. It is evident therefore, that the chief use and excellence of the doctrines of revelation must lie in the influence they have upon the sanctification, and consolation of our hearts: And indeed, the whole strain of the Scriptures shows us, that these are the great ends of all the discoveries of the Gospel. Our Saviour evidently supposes that truth is of a purifying nature when he prays, \* *Sanctify them thro' thy truth: thy word is truth.* The Apostle teaches the same doctrine, when he asserts, † *that God hath from the beginning chosen us to salvation, thro' sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth:* The Apostle John, after speaking of the truths of the Gospel, adds, ‡ *These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.* And indeed it must be obvious to every one who attends to the natural operation of truth upon the minds of men, that it is not the precepts of Christianity, but the truths of it, which are the direct and immediate means of purifying and comforting their hearts. It is not, for instance, the precept, *Love not the world*, but it is the clear discernment of the truth, that worldly things are vain and insufficient for happiness, which is the effectual mean of abating our too ardent love and pursuit

\* John xvii. 17.

† 2 Thes. ii. 13.

‡ 1 John i. 4.

pursuit of them. It is not the precept, *Humble yourselves*, but it is the clear view and lively impression of the truth of our state, as dependent, weak, indigent, depraved, and guilty creatures, that produces a humble temper of mind. It is not the command *To love God with all your hearts*, but it is a full view of the truth of the Divine character as excellent and perfect in the highest degree, which is the natural means of kindling the sacred flame of love in our breasts. It is not the precept, *Rejoice in the Lord Jesus*, but it is the belief of the truth, as to his glorious character and undertaking, and the mighty benefits we enjoy and hope to enjoy by him, which excites real joy in our hearts. Here then lies the excellency and wisdom of the doctrines of the Gospel, that they tally exactly with the present state of mankind, and are admirably adapted, (with the concurrence of Divine assistance, which we are encouraged to ask) to cure every disease, every disorder of the human heart, to beget, to cherish and confirm, every pure, every virtuous, every pious disposition, and to establish our souls in peace and joy. Every one must be sensible that the bounds prescribed for this discourse will not permit me to take all the doctrines of Christianity under consideration, and to show that the firm belief of each of them has a natural tendency to cleanse us from the filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect in us true holiness, and spiritual joy. We may just mention a few instances for the illustration of the point.

Thus, is it a certain fact, that mankind are at present in a state of corruption, and at the same time apt to be insensible of the misery and danger of it under the government of God? Surely nothing can be conceived more fit to awaken them to a just sense of



of their condition, than a messenger from Heaven clothed with the authority of God, setting before them the intrinsic malignity and misery of sin, and the certain, the dreadful and eternal consequences of continuing in the love and practice of it. If we could descend to a particular view of the several disorders and corruptions of the souls of men, it were easy to show, that the firm belief of the doctrines of the Gospel, is the natural and the best antidote or remedy for each of them: And particularly it might be shown, that the clear and full manifestation which the Gospel has given of the character of God, and the laws of his moral government, and of the terms of salvation, are admirably calculated to root out the principles of superstition, and of all false notions destructive to the virtue and happiness of mankind, and to plant in their room those principles which have a natural tendency to promote their virtue, their perfection and felicity. But this would be a subject more proper for a practical treatise, than a single sermon. Every one who has a just value for the doctrines of the Gospel, and who takes pleasure in the contemplation of Divine Wisdom, will trace out with great delight, the natural operations and effects of the truths of revelation, on the hearts of those who really believe them.

Again, are mankind in a state of guilt? Is there a sense of guilt and dread of the Divine displeasure so universal among mankind, in some degree or other, that it may be considered as a characteristick of the species? Are the minds of all sorts of men, from the most learned Philosophers down to the greatest Savages, subject on some occasions and some serious moments, to such remorse as makes them wish for some method of expiating their offences? Are the minds even of the most enlightned men,  
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these who have the highest standard of moral perfection and the quickest sense of duty, so conscious of the guilt of sins of lesser malignity, and of the omissions of what they ought to have done, that they dread what the consequences may be under the government of a God of perfect holiness? Does not this sense of guilt sometimes rise to such a degree of anxiety as greatly to disturb, and sometimes even to distract the minds of men? Does the force of this natural sentiment appear not only in individuals, but in the societies of mankind? Have atonements of one sort or another, for averting the displeasure of Deity, been established in all national religions in all ages of the world? What can be conceived more admirably fitted to give relief and consolation to the heart of man, alarmed with the fears of deserved punishment, than the doctrines of the gospel, *† that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing to men their trespasses*; and that Jesus Christ, by his obedience and humiliation to death, even the death of the cross, has offered up *‡* an atonement of the highest dignity and most perfect and extensive efficacy, of which the Great God, and merciful

*†* 2 Cor. v. 19.

*‡* There is reason to suspect that some are prejudiced against the doctrine of Jesus Christ's being the propitiation for the sins of the world, from a wrong notion of it, as implying that God was rendered merciful and placable by it, when he was otherwise before: Whereas it is the clear and undisputed doctrine of the gospel, that God is essentially benign and merciful; and that the propitiation is so far from being the cause of the Divine mercy, that it is the effect of it: It was the essential mercy of the Divine Nature, which moved him to appoint the atonement, and to accept of it. The atonement thro' the blood of Jesus, is the method chosen by infinite wisdom of extending his essential mercy to penitents, in a way perfectly consistent with the purity, the righteousness, the order and dignity of his moral government.

merciful Governor of the world, has given the highest testimony of his acceptance.

The time will not allow me to point out in what a variety of ways, and with what Divine wisdom, this doctrine of Christianity, with the other doctrines of the exaltation of Jesus to be a Prince and Saviour, connected with it, are calculated to promote both the purity and joy of the hearts of the children of men. Let it only be observed, that the peculiar doctrines of our peace and acceptance with God thro' Jesus Christ, and that the only acceptable method of approaching to God in religious worship, is in the name of Jesus, have a native tendency to bear down that vanity, pride and self-confidence, so apt to arise in the heart of man, and to beget and preserve that humility of mind, which is the only true foundation, on which the whole superstructure of the virtues of the Christian life can be raised. The serious and habitual sense of those important truths, must carry along with it an humbling impression of our guilt and unworthiness, while at the same time it solaces our hearts, with the exalting hopes of the favour of God, and of that eternal life, which is his gift thro' Jesus Christ.

We cannot conclude this head, without observing the conspicuous wisdom of the appointment of the one Mediator the sole Head, the sole Law-giver and Judge of his Church. It was a very antient prediction concerning him, *that to him the gathering of the people should be*, Gen. xlix. 10. There is a later one to the same purpose, John xi. 52. *That he should gather together in one, the children of God, that were scattered abroad.* The whole New Testament is full of this doctrine, *that he is the head in whom all fulness dwells.* He himself foretold, *that when he should be lifted up, he would draw all men after him.* It is evident to every one, that the reducing of men



under one great head, is the most natural mean of uniting them to one another, and to the great God and Father of all. The most ordinary observation of the world, will convince every one what a mighty power the attachment to one chief in learning, in arts or in government always has, to bind men together in affection, and friendly society. This is the effect of it, when there is nothing but joint admiration, without dependence and expectations; but the effect is much stronger, when there is a great dependence and hopes of many great advantages common to all, from the power and favour of the leader. How much more then must the subjecting of mankind to one great and glorious Head, for whom they have the highest veneration, from whom they have received the most invaluable benefits, and on whom all their future hopes depend, contribute to unite them in the strictest bonds of friendship. Here are all possible motives to the most hearty and entire union; here are no sources of division and dissension from competition of interest or rivalship in the favour of the Prince. All faithful subjects are equally assured of his favour and protection, and of being conducted forward to final felicity and glory under his Divine administration. Perhaps it will be asked, Since it is the natural tendency of this constitution to produce union, why does not the effect follow, why do we not see a total union among the subjects of this kingdom? If this were the proper place for it, perhaps it might be shown, that it has produced very real and visible effects, besides these invisible ones which it certainly does produce at all times on the minds of all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We have ground to hope, that it will still operate in a more conspicuous manner, even in this world. The full and perfect effects of it are justly hoped

hoped for in some future period, according to the all-prevalent prayer of the glorious Head himself, *That they may be one, even as we are one*, John xvii. 21. 22.

The tendency of this Divine appointment of one Mediator the Head of all, to unite mankind unto God, is so plain and obvious, that it is scarcely necessary to illustrate it. It must be evident at first sight, that the submission of mankind to this one great Head and Minister of Providence, is at the same time an actual subjection to the Father who appointed Him. There is an inseparable connection betwixt subjection to the Son of God, constituted by the Father, Lord and Judge of all, and real subjection to the Father himself. The laws of the Mediator, are the laws of God; and the very first and greatest of these laws is, to love the one God, with all our hearts, and with all our souls. Besides, Jesus is the Image of the invisible God, \* *he that hath known him, knows the Father also*. The love of the perfect Image, coincides with the love of the all-perfect Original. † *He that hateth the Son, hateth the Father also*. That union with God and man, must for ever constitute the highest perfection and happiness of our rational and immortal natures, is a truth so plain and evident, that it needs neither explication nor proof.

We shall conclude this part of the subject, by observing that this circumstance, that the great Mediator was once visible in a body, tabernacling among mankind, is not to be overlooked in an enquiry into the wisdom of the Christian scheme. For, by dwelling in flesh, he was qualified to instruct us in the will of God in a familiar manner, to set us a perfect examples of all virtues, in a real human character, to have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities, and to suffer and die as a propitiation for our sins. To which,

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\* John xiv. 7.

† John xv. 23.

perhaps, it may be added, that as the mind of man seems some-how to stand in need of something visible, on which the imagination can lay hold and rest itself; the Gospel is wisely accommodated to this demand of human nature. When we meditate on our glorious Mediator, who is now invisible, under the characters of our great Instructor, High-priest, and Law-giver; we can more easily stay our imaginations, and fix our thoughts, by reflecting upon him as once visible in our nature, than we could have done, had he been a purely angelical Being, who had never appeared in a visible form upon Earth, or conversed with mankind.

We now proceed to the *second* head, under which we summed up the matter of Christianity, namely the precepts of it. Here it is not intended to explain or illustrate, the purity and perfection of the Christian precepts, or to compare them with any other systems of morals, which may have been held in esteem among mankind, that their superior excellency may thence appear. Let it suffice at present to observe, that tho' the precepts of our holy religion are not the direct and immediate means of our sanctification and comfort, as has been shown under the former head; yet they are real, tho' more remote means of them, and as important and essential parts of the Gospel as the doctrines themselves. It is the laws of Christianity which set before us that standard of moral perfection, which we ought to have always full in our eye: They lay us under the solemn and indispensable obligation to aspire perpetually to nearer conformity to the perfections and to the will of God in all holiness of heart and life. It is the laws of Jesus which enjoin us in the strongest and the most sacred manner, to employ our most serious attention upon the truths of his religion, to inculcate them upon



upon ourselves, till they produce their full effect on the purity and comfort of our souls: And indeed, without a humble consciousness that we have endeavoured to govern ourselves by the laws of our religion, as far as human infirmity will permit, we can have no well grounded hope of the favour of God, and of that happy *immortality, which is brought to light by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Having taken this general view of the Matter of the revelation of the Gospel, we now go forward to consider what was proposed in the *second* place; the Manner of communicating it, and of confirming the truth of it.

The wisdom of the Gospel is no less conspicuous in the manner of communicating its instruction than in the matter of it. That faith in the testimony of a Divine teacher, is a method of instruction more suited to the present state of mankind, than that of laboured deductions of Reason and Philosophy, is evident on the smallest reflection. The bulk of mankind never were, nor are at present in such a situation, that they could reason out a clear and full system of the truths of religion for themselves, or even follow the trains of reasonings of others, so as to receive satisfactory conviction from them. But when the doctrines of religion are delivered as communications from the Father of lights by a person who has given full evidence of his Divine commission, there is not only a plain foundation laid for giving credit to his testimony, but it is accompanied with an authority which commands the attention of the human mind, and imposes an obligation upon it to believe and obey. Thousands, nay, millions of mankind, may be brought to the knowledge of the truths and duties of natural religion, in this way, who could never have attained to it, by disquisitions of Philosophy;

Philosophy ; and as to the peculiar truths of Divine Revelation, there is no other way of attaining the knowledge of them.

The Gospel method of instruction is further accommodated, with the most striking wisdom, to the circumstances of mankind, as it not only employs the plainest and most simple expressions and similitudes, in the delivery of its doctrines and precepts ; but it takes the assistance of such facts, and examples, as the lowest understanding can easily comprehend, and the weakest memory may easily retain : Does the Gospel teach the rejoicing doctrine of the resurrection of the dead ? It not only does it by plain assertions, but examples of dead persons raised to life. Does it teach that the Saviour has the power of forgiving sins ? He exercises, in the view of all, that very power by delivering men from these diseases which are the punishments of sin. Again, is the one eternal God, the creator of all things, too great, and too glorious an object for our weak minds to behold ? Would his unvailed glory quite over-power our feeble natures ? The Gospel exhibits him to us, in a mild and shaded glory, in the person, the character, and conduct of Jesus ; *who is the visible image of the invisible God.* The Divine perfections and providence are represented to us in him, in a way suited to our low capacities. When our Saviour said, *I will, be thou clean;* and, *Man, stretch forth thy withered hand,* and the effect instantaneously followed, he gave a striking representation of that Almighty creative power, which brought this universe into existence. When he said to the sea, *Be thou calm,* he gave an image of the Sovereign dominion of God over all nature. His many unerring predictions of future events, were a lively representation of that Divine foreknowledge and omniscience, which sees at one view the whole series

ries of events, from the beginning, to the end of time. It were easy in like manner to show, that the spotless purity, the disinterested and ever active goodness, the melting compassion, the unconquerable meekness, the incomparable lenity, and forgiving temper, of the Son of man manifested in his character and conduct, are the justest and noblest representations of the moral perfections of God.

Add to this, that in the life of Jesus, we have all the Christian virtues set before us, in their full perfection, as patterns for our imitation: And this is done in a series of facts well calculated to inform the judgment, to warm the affections, and to make a lasting impressions upon the memory: This pattern is not only perfect, and suited to our condition, but is further enforced by the dignity of the person, and by the sweet but powerful influence accompanying the idea of the Friend, the Benefactor and Saviour: Besides, we have in Jesus, not only a pattern of all virtue, but a pattern also of the reward that shall be bestowed upon it. *As he overcame and is set down with his Father on his throne\**; if we overcome the temptations of the world, he will grant to us to sit down with him on his throne. Here is a proof from fact, of a future reward. And surely a more elevating and triumphant consideration cannot enter into the heart of man, than this, that our common nature is already crowned with glory and honour, in the person of Jesus Christ; and that if we resemble him in purity and goodness here, we shall be made like unto him, in felicity and glory hereafter.

Again, The Divine wisdom of the method in which Christianity is confirmed, will appear, if we consider that the proofs which it offers of its truth, are not such subtle and difficult reasonings,

\* Rev. iii. 21.



as may perplex the minds of mankind, but they are either appeals to the natural sentiments of the human heart, or to such facts and events, as lie open to the examination of persons of all capacities. What is commonly called the internal evidence of Christianity is nothing else, but an appeal to the heart of man, as to the excellency of its doctrines and precepts, and as to the perfect purity, goodness and integrity, of the character of its author. The external evidence from miracles and prophecies, are every way suited to work on the minds of all mankind.

Miracles are the seals of heaven, and strike conviction at once. But besides their being the most authentic evidences of the divine commission of him that performs them, and of the truth of the doctrines which he publishes, they at the same time are the most irresistible proofs, that this visible world has a Superior who can alter and change its order and laws at his pleasure : Some of the inquiring and philosophical part of mankind, have inclined to conclude from the regularity and stability of the order of the material world, that it cannot be changed by any power whatsoever, nay that this whole of things is the eternal and self-existent Being. Miracles are the shortest and most unanswerable confutation of this impious and atheistical opinion.

The other great proof of Christianity taken from the accomplishment of prophecies, is likewise accommodated, with the highest wisdom, to the condition of mankind. Predictions of whole series's of events the most conspicuous, the most memorable, the most interesting of all others in the course of the world, and quite beyond the reach of all human foresight, when perceived to be exactly accomplished, can scarce fail to strike persons of all conditions and of all capacities, and produce a conviction of the most satisfactory kind

kind of a supreme intelligence and wisdom, conducting all the affairs of the world : How much the belief of a Providence directing and governing all things, elevates the human mind and fills it with a pure and sacred joy, the experience of all virtuous persons will abundantly testify. And at the same time, the undoubted accomplishment of these prophecies gives the fullest satisfaction, that the person who delivered them knows the counsels and will of God in other instances, and may be safely relied on when he speaks in the name of God, and declares his will, either concerning the rules of life, and the terms upon which sinners may be received into his favour, or concerning the future and eternal state of those who embrace and of those who reject the gospel.

This argument from prophecy is peculiarly adapted to establish the mind in the fullest persuasion of the certainty of what the gospel reveals concerning a future judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and a happy immortality beyond death and the grave: It must be acknowledged, that the accomplishment of numberless former predictions is the best pledge and security that those which are not yet accomplished shall also come to pass in God's due time. The acutest philosophers readily admit, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is incapable of strict demonstrative evidence. Yet without the persuasion of it, all other doctrines, even these of a good God, and wise providence, tho' never so fully demonstrated, can impart but feeble and imperfect consolation to the hearts of mortal creatures. Where then shall we go for satisfaction as to this most interesting of all questions? Shall we sit down at the feet of the Philosophers who acknowledge they cannot satisfy us? Shall we rely on their conjectures and probable reasonings? Or shall we hearken to the Prophetic spirit, which

has been tried and found faithful in all instances from the beginning of the world to this day. Surely that Spirit which has given the most convincing evidence imaginable that it foresaw the whole train of events from the beginning to the end of this world, may be relied upon as best qualified to inform us of what is to follow after the dissolution of the present state of things.

To conclude, it is a further proof of the wisdom of prophecy as a principal evidence of Divine revelation, that it gives the strongest presumption of the reality of miracles. For if there are the most convincing proofs that some men have been endowed with extraordinary, nay supernatural knowledge and foresight, this renders it highly probable that the same persons, or others for the same great and good ends, may also have been endowed with miraculous powers. And thus we who live in the present age, and have equal, if not in some respects fuller, evidence of the fulfilment of prophecies, than those who lived in former ones, may justly consider the argument from prophecy as a strong confirmation of all the other evidences, with which the reality of the gospel miracles is ascertained. From what has been suggested it appears, that whether we consider the matter of the Christian revelation, the manner of communicating it, or the kind of evidence with which it is supported, we shall find they all concur to ascertain the perfect wisdom of its author. If any one pretends to call in question the perfect propriety and fitness of the means which the Divine Wisdom has chosen in the gospel to enlighten, to convert and save mankind, it is incumbent upon him to devise another set of means better calculated to accomplish these great and good ends. On this point we may be secure, and safely challenge the utmost efforts of human imagination



to form any scheme, the wisdom of which will be able to bear any comparison with the wisdom of the gospel.

The *second* observation is, that the Apostle's assertion implies, or rather indeed expresses, that this scheme of the salvation of mankind by the gospel revelation shall be made effectual. It has pleased God actually to save by it those who embrace and submit to it. The effects of Christianity are too large a subject to be treated here at full length: Let it suffice at present to make a few observations.

Such as, *First*; that many of the most real and important effects of the dispensation of the gospel are of a silent and invisible nature, and cannot admit of such proof as is not liable to dispute and cavil among those who love obscurity and doubtfulness. We cannot draw aside the veil which hides the invisible world, and show the myriads who thro' faith in Jesus Christ already inherit the promises, and rejoice in the full and uninterrupted assurance of the favour of God. Neither can the secret yet powerful efficacy of the doctrines of Christianity, in turning many millions in this present state *from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan to the service of the living God*, and in pouring the most divine consolations into their hearts, under the distresses of life, and in the hour of death, be demonstrated in such a manner as to silence those who are determined to gainsay it.

*Secondly*, It may be observed, that as the principles of Christianity have an undoubted, natural and invariable tendency to produce good effects, and as they have taken hold of the minds of innumerable multitudes of mankind, thro' a course of ages, they must have produced them in some degree: To say that no good effects have been produced in any degree, or in any one instance by the principles of the gospel tho' acknowledged

acknowledged to be believed, amounts to a denial of the tendency of them. This is what the highest scepticism will not venture to assert. But we do not rest the argument upon the tendency, but assert that Christianity has actually produced good effects as conspicuous and undeniable, at least, as were ever produced by any other principles whatever; and that they were the effects of Christianity in the strictest sense, and cannot be ascribed to any other causes, we maintain on these three grounds: *First*, Because they flowed naturally from the principles of Christianity; *Secondly*, Because they were produced on those only who believed and professed them; and *Thirdly*, Because they were not accidental and transitory effects, but as lasting and steady as the principles themselves, and accompanied them wherever they spread. For instance, the great fundamental doctrine of one only God, the sole Object of worship, and to be worshipped thro' one Mediator, and the principal part of whose worship consists in rational prayers and praises, and imitation of his moral perfections, as it has a natural tendency to extirpate the principles of polytheism and superstition, so it did in fact extirpate them, in the most visible manner: These who embraced this great essential principle, at once threw off that immense load of superstitious practices, to which the doctrine of numberless objects of worship had formerly subjected them; the civil and ecclesiastical history of the first ages of Christianity affords the fullest evidence that the converts to Christianity would not join in any one rite or ceremony performed in honour of the heathen gods. Such a mighty revolution did the belief of one God, produce not only in the minds, but in the practice of Christians. The history of the persecutions under the

the heathen Emperors, in which they suffered death in the most formidable shapes, rather than offer incense or sacrifice to a heathen god, is a standing demonstration of the undoubted effects which their principles had upon them. And it is certain, that wherever Christianity spread, it entirely demolished polytheism and all its appendages. So that now for more than a thousand years, incense has not been offered or a libation made to any heathen deity, thro' the greatest part at least of the Roman Empire: It is so evident that these effects bear all the three characters mentioned above of real and genuine ones, that it needs not be particularly illustrated. And if we candidly compare this change which Christianity has introduced with the change made by any sect of Philosophy, any institution of religion or civil government, we shall be at no loss to determine which is the greatest.

Again; the effect of the Christian principles in abolishing the evocation of demons, with all the train of absurd and sometimes horrid practices which accompanied it, is extremely remarkable. The history of the heathen world allows us no room to doubt, that not only the vulgar, but the most learned Philosophers and Emperors were addicted, almost to a degree of frenzy, to the practice of \* theurgick or diabolical rites,

\* There were two kinds of magick in the heathen world; the one was called *Theurgy*, and the other *Sorcery*. The first was employed in the worship of the good and beneficent demons, and however strange, fanatical and absurd it really was, yet in the opinion of those who practised it, it was a divine art, which had no other aim than to purify and perfect the souls of men; and those who were so happy as to perform the rites of it in a right manner, enjoyed intimate communion with the demons, were invested with all their powers, and admitted to the full vision of their essence. The other kind (*viz. Sorcery*) was employed only in the worship



rites, as certain means of maintaining communion with the demons, and of obliging them to comply with their desires. As the renunciation of all communion with demons was the natural tendency of the belief of Christianity, so we find in fact that it sometimes produced this effect in an immediate and instantaneous manner; Acts of the Apostles xix. 17. 18. 19. verses. *And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many also of them which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty pieces of silver.* That these curious books contained the rules to be observed for the acceptable performance of the magical or theurgick arts, is acknowledged by all inquirers into antiquity.

It deserves our particular attention, in an enumeration of the good effects of the revelation of the gospel, that the subjection of Christians to one great head, their sole Instructor and Lawgiver, has produced such an unity of faith as to many essential articles both of natural and revealed religion, as (notwithstanding differences of opinion in lesser matters) was never found in the heathen world. It has likewise produced an uniform reception of a body of moral laws, of such acknowledged excellence, that nothing

of the wicked demons; the ceremonies of it were horrible and shocking, and the end proposed by it was to do mischief, and to perpetrate crimes. This distinction ought to be carried along with us in judging of many of the highest characters in the antient world. The kind of magick to which they were devoted, gives ground for a considerable difference in the judgment we form of them. Whether the passage in 19th of the Acts refers to the one or other of these kinds of magick, or to both, we shall not now inquire.

nothing even in imagination can be conceived more pure and perfect. These effects of this divine constitution of one glorious head are more important and signal than is commonly imagined, and must always prove a real foundation of union among christians.

The doctrine too of the all-sufficient sacrifice of the great High-Priest of our profession, who by *one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*, has put an end to the practice of animal sacrifices, as well as to the more horrid custom of human ones, both which prevailed in the greatest part of the antient world.

That the genius of Christianity is kind and benign, must be admitted by every one who attends to it. According to the Christian doctrine, *God is Love, and dwells in Love*; and the great Mediator was animated in the whole of his undertaking by the same generous and divine principle: The laws of Jesus breathe nothing but love and tenderness: and his whole life is one continued proof of the most disinterested and unwearied beneficence: The Christian heaven is the land of love and of everlasting friendship. This benign spirit of our holy religion has manifested itself in producing the most beneficial effects, in a variety of ways, wherever it has been received and understood. The influence of it upon the civil laws of nations, in making them more gentle and merciful than they were before, must be owned by all who have read history with a proper attention.

The laws prohibiting the exposition of infants, and † the bloody and barbarous entertainment of Gladiators ;

† Those who have not attended to history are apt to imagine that the exhibition of Gladiators was a rare thing, and that when it happened a few pairs only were engaged. But it was far otherwise: Under the Roman Emperors, this inhuman entertainment cost innumerable lives. Cæsar, when Edile, gave 320 Gladiators: Gordian,

Gladiators; the laws and customs softning or abolishing slavery, and those regulating the commerce betwixt the sexes, by forbidding Polygamy, and restraining the licentiousness of divorcing, have all flowed from the spirit of Christianity, and have prevented much misery, and been the sources of great happiness to mankind. †

It is not necessary to insist at full length on the visible good effects of Christianity on the tempers and manners of the first Christians. If we were to produce here the whole evidence we have for the distinguished purity and goodness of the lives of the first Christians, when compared with their Heathen neighbours, we might insist on the following topicks; the authority of the Apostles in their epistles, the testimony of the antient Christian Writers, the solemn appeals to acknowledged facts in the apologies for Christianity presented to Heathen Emperors, and the

dian, in the time of his Edileship, exhibited twelve entertainments, that is one for each month: In some of these there were 500 champions, and in none of them less than 150. Taking it at a medium, he must have exhibited at the very least 3000. Titus exhibited these cruel shows for 100 days together. The good and moderate Trajan, continued these spectacles for 123 days, and in that time gave 10,000. When we consider how many different ranks of people gave these entertainments, Ediles, Pretors, Questors, Consuls, Emperors and Priests, besides private persons at funerals, (which became so common a practice, that it was an article in a last will,) we must be convinced, that the numbers were incredible: What adds to the inhumanity of this custom is, that it was designed for a gay entertainment, and attended as such. This horrible custom grew to such an extravagance, that it was found necessary to moderate it by law, in the time of the Heathen Emperors. Constantine first prohibited it altogether; but so violent was the taste for it, that it crept in again. The Emperor Honorius entirely suppressed it.

† It would be a work for a treatise, and perhaps a very useful one, to trace out the civil laws which took their rise from the spirit of Christianity, and to delineate their happy effects on society, thro' a course of ages.



the \* encomiums made upon them by the Heathens themselves, and some of them their most inveterate enemies: All these circumstances united, form a proof as strong and convincing, as can well be given for any fact of so antient a date.

*Thirdly*, This assertion of the Apostle, further implies, that the scheme of the salvation of mankind, thro' faith in the revelation of the Gospel, is a chief object of Divine Providence. *It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe.* The word in the original is very significant, but our translation does not reach the full import of it. It denotes a high degree of delight and complacency in a person or thing. It is the word used by the miraculous voice at our Saviour's baptism and transfiguration, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* It might easily be shown, that the same grounds of complacency are referred to in these passages, and in the text. An expression of such energy (*it pleased God highly*,) when applied to the gospel method of salvation, seems to denote, that it is the chief scheme of Providence with respect to mankind, to which all others are subservient. And indeed the general strain of the Scriptures lead us to conceive of it in this elevated view. We are every where taught in the New Testament, that the appearance of the Saviour among mankind, was in consequence of an original plan of Providence laid before the world began, 2 Tim. i. 9. 10. *God, who hath saved us, according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest*  
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\* Such as the Emperor Julian's recommendation to one of his High priests, to imitate the manners of the Christians: This fact we are assured of by the Emperor's own letter, which is still remaining.

*by the appearing of our Lord and Saviour. Eph. i. 3. 4. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundations of the world.* † Besides, according to the best notions we can form of the wisdom and goodness of God, either from reason or revelation, the deliverance of mankind from a state of darkness, corruption and guilt, and the restoration of them to a state of light, purity and friendship with God, must be the ultimate design of all the dispensations of Providence towards them. This view of things, is further confirmed from the history of Providence, as preserved in the sacred Scriptures: There we have a series of dispensations narrated, which gradually unfold the designs of Heaven, and lead forward towards the manifestation of the Messiah, as a grand period.

The most remarkable revelations of the will of God made to Abraham, and the Patriarchs who succeeded him, till Moses, and the whole succession of Prophets from him, down to Malachy, point towards this great event. It was the ultimate design of the separation of the descendants of Jacob from the rest of mankind, and of the whole Mosaic dispensation, to prepare the world for the advent of the Messiah, and to administer full evidence of him, when he should appear. If the posterity of Jacob had been permitted to intermingle with the other families of mankind, the antient promises made to the Fathers, must have been dissipated and lost, and no proof two thousand years afterwards, could have been produced, that Jesus was of the seed of Abraham: But by the distinct account of the family of Abraham, till the pro-

† Eph. i. 10. 1 Pet. i. 20. John xvii. 24. Rev. xiii. 8.

promulgation of the law, by the constitution of the Jewish Republic, in which care was taken, that not only the Jewish Nation should be kept distinct from all others, but the genealogical registers of the particular families should be preserved, it was easy to trace up the pedigree of the Messiah to its source at the greatest distance of time, and shew, that he was descended not only of Abraham, but from what particular family of his numerous posterity, thro' the whole series of generations: Add to this, that the civil constitution of the Jews, under whose authority the sacred books were kept, was a noble guard and security for the preservation and authenticity of the promises, and that the whole plan of Ceremonial worship, was so contrived, as to preserve the knowledge of the one true God, and to prefigure the Person, the Offices, and the Blessings of the Reign of the Messiah.

Besides, the revolutions which that singular people underwent, tho' we cannot explain the particular manner, were some-how connected with, and conducive to the completion of the grand scheme, for which they were at first separated from the rest of the nations of the world. Nay, the revolutions of the other nations of the earth, the rise, the progress, the downfall, and the succession of empires, we have ground to believe, were so ordained and conducted, as to be subservient in some way, and in some degree, to the introduction of the glorious empire of truth and righteousness under the Son of God: We learn from the \* sacred books, that the Persian Monarchy under Cyrus, was raised up to re-establish the Jews in their own land: Their restoration to their own land, under their own laws,

was

\* Isaiah xlv. 4.



was necessary to accomplish the † antient prophecy, *That the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a Law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.* We are informed in many other passages of the sacred Writings, that other nations were employed as instruments in the hand of Providence, to favour and to protect, or to chastise and punish the chosen people: These protections and chastisements, contributed to spread the knowledge of the true God, and the promises of the Messiah. When we attend to some of the ancient prophecies, particularly those of ‡ Daniel, we find him describing the succession of the great empires, as terminating in the establishment of the spiritual empire, under the long expected Saviour. It has been frequently, and very justly observed, that the union of so many great and populous kingdoms under the extensive empire of the Romans, at our Saviour's birth, facilitated and hastened the wide propagation of his Divine Religion,

These hints from Scripture, and observations upon Providence, together with many others which might be collected, seem to intimate, that all the amazing variety of revolutions among mankind, in all nations, and in all ages, are so connected (tho' in a way incomprehensible to us) as to form one great scheme of universal Providence, the result and conclusion of which, shall be a happy and glorious establishment of all things under the empire of the Son of God.

To all which we may add, that not only the revolutions and successions of empires, but the course of learning, philosophy and arts, were made subservient under the direction of Providence, to the introduction

† Gen. xlix. 10.

‡ Dan. ii. 34. 35.

production of the true Wisdom, by the revelation of the Gospel. Tho' Philosophy, as has been already shown, did not conduct mankind to the true knowledge of God; yet we must not hence conclude that it was entirely useless: No! In the hand of God, it produced good effects, tho' unforeseen and unintended, by the Philosophers themselves. Their exposing the grosser instances of the Poetical and Popular Religions, their teaching many excellent doctrines, and recommending many excellent virtues, were natural means of preparing the minds of men for embracing the truth, when fully displayed to their view. The turning the attention of mankind to moral and intellectual objects and inquiries, produces great effects upon their minds: it awakens them from the lethargy of gross Sensuality; it abates the keenness of worldly pursuits; it spiritualizes them in some degree, and prepares them for receiving a more pure and refined institution of Religion. The very spirit of Inquiry, rais'd by Philosophy, qualified men for searching into the meaning, importance and evidence of Christianity; and consequently, favoured the reception of it, by fair and candid minds.

Thus all the great lines of providence thro' the course of preceeding ages, were directed towards and centered in that great revolution, which according to the eternal counsels of God was to be accomplished by the Messiah. But as the whole scheme of providence was not then compleated, there is no reason to doubt, that it has been carrying on in a continual progress since that time, tho' we are unable to trace all the steps of it; and that it shall be carried on thro' succeeding ages, until its final completion. There is ground to believe from the ancient prophecies, that the larger communication among mankind

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in all known parts of the globe opened up in later ages, is intended by providence to prepare the way for spreading the knowledge of the Saviour over the face of the whole earth. The marvellous preservation of the Jews as a distinct people for such a long succession of ages may be intended to serve some illustrious purposes of providence, with respect to the establishment of the divine revelation of Jesus in its full evidence and universal prevalence among mankind: And if it be true, that the whole plan of providence with respect to mankind was formed with a view to their restoration to purity, perfection and happiness, thro' Jesus Christ; and that all things all along have been conducted, and shall be conducted to the final accomplishment of this grand design; hence we see how justly Jesus may be said in the emphatical language of scripture to be *the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things.*

We proceed now to the last thing proposed, to point out the practical instructions flowing from what has been said.

In the *first* place, Is the Christian religion the great mean ordained by God before all ages to enlighten, to sanctify and save such as believe? Hence we may learn not to be much afraid of the utmost efforts of scepticism and unbelief: We may be assured the schemes of providence will be carried into execution in spite of all opposition that can possibly be given to them. No doubt, the labours of Infidels will, on loose and thoughtless minds, have the most pernicious effects, which is to be lamented; but the native goodness and excellence of the religion of Jesus is so striking, the prospects which it opens are so grand and rejoicing, and its evidence is so much adapted to make impression upon every fair and unprejudiced mind, that it is impossible any general revolution



volution should ever be brought about against it. The attempts to discredit it, like other bad attempts, will be over-ruled by providence, to promote the interests of that cause they were intended to destroy.

*Secondly*, Is the gospel the plan formed by divine wisdom for accomplishing the highest perfection and happiness of mankind? Hence we may perceive the reason why faith is so peremptorily required and so much insisted on in the New Testament, as a term of our acceptance with God: The great and good Governor of the world may most certainly command his disobedient subjects, to submit to that scheme, which his infinite wisdom has devised, as the best of all others to deliver them from all the effects and consequences of their disobedience. Is it admitted, that he may reasonably require his rebellious subjects to repent of their rebellion, and return to their allegiance? Must it not likewise be admitted as equally just and reasonable, that he require them to comply with the utmost cheartfulness and gratitude with that method which his wisdom has contrived, as the most effectual of all others to secure them in their duty for the time to come, to form them to a willing subjection to his authority, and to that temper and character which constitutes their highest perfection and felicity under his divine administration. The command therefore to believe in Jesus is as kind and merciful as it is just and reasonable. It is as much the happiness as it is the duty of mankind to yield obedience to it. Let us beware lest we suffer ourselves to slide insensibly and without design into unbelief, from an unexamined persuasion, that if we adhere to natural religion and endeavour to perform the duties which it prescribes, any attention to Christianity or faith

faith in it, is altogether superfluous and unnecessary : Let us consider, that we owe to the light which Christianity has spread in the world, these clear and settled views of the doctrines and precepts of natural religion, which we suppose to be all that is necessary for us to know, and to practise ; and if we do owe this knowledge to the instructions of Christianity, can any thing be more unreasonable or ungrateful, than not only to refuse to acknowledge the mighty benefit, but to pervert it into an argument for disregarding the great and kind instructor ? — Further, Is Jesus Christ constituted by God the Father, the sole enlightner of the world, the sole dispenser of spiritual blessings, and the sole Lawgiver and Judge of mankind ? Is he clearly revealed to us as standing invested in these high offices ? If we refuse to acknowledge him in them, we are guilty of direct contempt of the authority of God, who constituted him : And this is to act contrary to the first and fundamental principle of all natural religion, That God ought to be obeyed in all instances in which his authority is clearly interposed.

Again, do these offices form a real and important relation betwixt Jesus Christ and those of mankind to whom he is made known ? If we refuse to act suitably to those relations and to perform the duties arising from them, we act contrary to an obligation of the same moral kind with that which belongs to any other relation ; and consequently our disregarding this obligation, is as truly an act of immorality and a violation of natural religion, as our disregarding the duties which arise from the relations betwixt man and man, would be. Further still, has God chosen to communicate light, purity and comfort to mankind, by Jesus Christ ? Has he chosen  
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this method not of mere arbitrary pleasure, but as the wisest and best one possible for promoting their happiness? If we refuse to accept the favours of God, in that way in which he hath appointed them to be bestowed, we can have no reason to complain if we are deprived of them, and if we are subjected to the punishments due to those who reject their own mercies: Our Saviour has declared in a solemn manner, John xv. 4. *That we cannot bear fruit unless we abide in him*: And indeed it must be so, since he is the appointed Enlightner of the world, the Conductor of men to virtue, to glory and immortality. It is true indeed, that the Christian religion spreads thro' Society such a light and such beneficial influence, that even those who reject it partake of its effects, and may be in some degree influenced by it. But these effects and this influence must be very inconsiderable, when compared with what a proper attention to its doctrines, its laws, its examples, its promises, and its threatnings, must have on those who lay open their minds to the full impressions of them. And we are assured that as Jesus is the light of the world, those who follow after him, shall not *walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*. John viii. 12.

*Thirdly*, Is Christianity, the great, the wise and effectual mean ordained by God of saving those that believe? Hence we may infer, that it is the duty of every one to whom it is made known, not only to receive it himself, and lay open his own mind to its sacred influence; but to promote the submission of the rest of mankind to it, to the utmost of his power. It is an acknowledged maxim, that those in higher life, who possess riches, rank or authority, are bound to employ the weight and influence of their example, and every other mean in their power, to promote the

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happiness of the society of which they are members. If Christianity is by the appointment of providence the best and wisest scheme of rendering mankind happy, both in the present and in a future life, then certainly all those whom Providence has placed in superior stations, and who are the great examples and directors to the inferior classes of mankind, are under the most sacred obligations to exert themselves, in the most hearty and vigorous manner, to promote the influence of it in the hearts and lives of all around them: As they are the servants of Providence, they ought to look upon it as their greatest honour and happiness, as well as their duty, to concur with its great and good designs. It is obvious to every one, that the united influence of those in high life, would have a very great effect, to support and to spread a just sense of religion among the lower ranks of men: The mere neglecting to exert it, tho' it is only an omission of duty, yet as it is an omission attended with very extensive bad consequences, it must be criminal in the sight of God, and must expose the guilty persons to deserved punishment under his all-righteous administration.

But of all other orders of men, the Ministers of Jesus are under the most awful obligations, to promote the belief and acceptance of the Gospel Revelation. They are called by the voice of God, by the voice of Society to spend their time, and exert all their faculties in inculcating the truth, the importance, the excellency of the Christian Religion, and in spreading its influence every where around them. Let us then be just to our office: As we are sent of God, and retained by men, to this service, let us be wholly devoted to its sacred interests: Let God and man be witnesses that we are faithful. Let us  
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always remember, that it is the revelation of the will of God that we are called to teach, and that it is by this revelation, that God intended before all ages to enlighten and save those that believe, and that it was by this revelation that the world was actually *turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Sin and Satan, to the service of the Living God*, when human eloquence and wisdom were found ineffectual: Let us work then after the model which Providence has given; and preach the same Gospel that the Apostles preached. That Gospel which was the wisdom and power of God, producing most astonishing effects, in the conversion of the world, seventeen hundred years ago, is the same wisdom, and the same power still. To attempt to instruct or reform the world on any other plan, is to prefer our own schemes and views to those of an All-wise Providence: If we fall in with the method Infinite Wisdom has devised, we may depend upon the favourable concurrence of Providence, and that energy of Divine Grace which accompanied the Gospel at its first publication, and which we are assured will accompany it in some degree in all ages. But if we follow methods of our own invention, if we adopt the Philosophical schemes, either of antient or modern times, we have nothing to rely upon, but the poor effects of our own art or eloquence. Let us therefore look upon ourselves, as sacredly bound to teach the real doctrines of Christianity in their original purity and simplicity; and to apply them to these great ends of the purification and consolation of the souls of men, for which they were revealed and published to the world.

It is very observable, that we do not find in any parts of the Scriptures, that the doctrines of religion

ligion are ever laid down as mere speculative principles, but are always introduced, either as motives to the practice of some duty, or as grounds of peace and comfort to our minds. And if this is the constant strain of the Scriptures, it is an instructive lesson to us, what ought to be the strain of our preaching. If the Word of God has connected the doctrines, and the practice of religion together, it must be our indispensable duty never to separate them. And indeed there cannot be a better, or higher encomium made upon the Sacred Scriptures, than this, that they are totally practical.

In like manner, let us consider ourselves as lying under an equally indispensable obligation to preach the morality of the Gospel, on the principles, and in the way and manner, in which Jesus and his Apostles, our unerring guides, have taught it. Agreeably to our Saviour's doctrine, let us always remember that a regard to God is the first commandment of the law, and the highest obligation upon the human mind. And therefore, piety must not be inculcated merely as a mean towards an end, but is an end itself. The influence of devout regards to God on all the other parts of our duty, such as strengthening the social dispositions and enforcing the obligation of every branch of virtue, is acknowledged to be highly valuable. But we must not place the whole value of piety on this influence, however real and important it may be. Piety is a primary and essential part of duty, in itself, considered as independent of its effects on the other virtues of the Christian life: And as it is an original and essential part of duty, it is equally essential to our happiness. We cannot conceive any state, or any stage of existence, in which a dependent Being can be happy without just views of its Maker, and



and the exercise of proper dispositions towards him. On the other hand, all the other virtues of the Christian life must be taught as parts, or instances of the duty which we owe to God. Doing the will of God, or keeping the commandments of God, is the general view under which our Saviour and his Apostles have chosen to represent the whole duty of man. The commanding ideas of a law, and of a Supreme Lawgiver, to whom we are accountable, and who will reward, and punish, according to our deserts, are absolutely necessary for mankind, a set of creatures liable to be seduced from their duty and happiness by the impulses of a thousand irregular passions.

All the other views under which human duty can be conceived, such as something intrinsically excellent, as something perfectly beautiful, becoming or honourable, or as intire propriety of sentiment and behaviour, and such like as carry no reference to the will and authority of God, are quite unfit to govern such creatures as mankind, or perhaps any created Beings in any state, or any stage of their existence. And as that kind of virtue which disclaims all dependance on any thing beyond itself, is quite unsuitable to the subjects of God, so whatever air of strength, of purity and disinterestedness it may put on, will be found to be incapable to support itself in all trials, and to be accompanied with a certain pride and self-sufficiency, quite inconsistent with the character of dependent Beings, and with that disinterestedness of which it boasts.

Again, when we inculcate the morals of Christianity, let us take care to follow that order, in which our Saviour, who knew the nature of man, and all the natural connections of things, has placed them.

them. We read that he began his Gospel with a solemn call to repentance: The first maxim of his Divine Sermon on the Mount, is, *Blessed are the poor in Spirit*: And in other parts of the Gospel History, we find him assuring us in the most solemn manner, *that unless we humble ourselves, and become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God*. These things plainly intimate, that in his view of things, which was always according to truth, humility is the true foundation of all other virtues. That clear views, and habitual impressions of our condition as dependent, frail, indigent, mortal, and as corrupted and guilty creatures, are the true sources of humility, will be readily admitted.

It will also appear evident to every one who gives the least degree of attention to the workings of the human heart, that as soon as the mind is brought under these humbling views of itself, it easily and naturally flows out in acts of piety and devotion to God, and in emotions of pity, tenderness and charity to mankind. It were easy to show, that the humble temper of mind carries a natural propension to equity of disposition and behaviour, to meekness, candour, and forgiveness, to patience and contentment with our lot in the world, and to moderation under the greatest flow of worldly prosperity: It is likewise obvious, without a particular illustration, that the humble state of mind naturally corrects and restrains the excesses and irregularities of self-love and self-will, which are the fruitful parents of pride, hatred, malice, envy, and of the whole tribe of unfocial and malignant passions. That the humble mind is best disposed for receiving the glad tidings of the Gospel, can scarcely be doubted. Now, surely that state of mind which is so favourable

vourable to the exercise of all the finer dispositions, and which checks and suppresses the baser ones, must not only be consistent with the exercise of the more shining virtues of love to a country, public spirit, patriotism, magnanimity, generosity, heroism and the rest of that order, but must be the best foundation on which they can be raised. Some persons who pretend to be Philosophers, have so confounded all their moral notions, as to imagine humility and greatness of mind are inconsistent; and even to represent humility as connected with meanness and baseness of spirit. That there is no foundation for this charge will manifestly appear, if we consider, *First*, That the true notion of meanness, or baseness in a man, is something in his sentiment and behaviour below the dignity of his nature; and *next*, That one of the principal sources of humility, is a consciousness that we are sinners, or that we fall below that standard of moral perfection, which is set before us in the law of God, and in conformity to which our highest honour and dignity consists: Now to assert, that a man who carries about with him the purest standard of moral conduct, and mourns over every instance in which he departs from it, must upon that account be inclined to think and act in a way below the dignity of his nature, seems to be a very unphilosophical kind of reasoning. To make use of a similar instance; it is just as if one should assert, that a man who has formed the purest and highest ideal notion of what is just and excellent in writing, must for that very reason be mean and groveling in his compositions. The more accurately we observe the operations of the human heart, and the connexions betwixt the dispositions of it, we shall be so much the more fully persuaded, that it is the soundest Philosophy,



phy, as well as sound Divinity, that genuine humility is the true soil in which all the other virtues must be planted, and in which alone they can thrive and grow up to their full maturity and perfection.

As humility has such an extensive influence on all the other virtues, as it is such a fundamental article in the moral system of the gospel, and so little regarded, if not entirely omitted in other systems of morality, either antient or modern, not copied from it; allow me to illustrate further what has been said, by contrasting with it a character formed in a different or rather opposite way. Let us suppose a man, (and many such there are), who never seriously attended to the truth of his nature and condition, who has never reflected in earnest, that he is on a level with the lowest of mankind in all important respects, and who never felt any humbling impressions of himself; but whose attention in the course of his education, has been turned to the contemplation of the dignity of human nature, the intrinsic excellence of the more striking virtues, and upon the renown and glory they bring along with them wherever they appear: what will be the natural effects of such a habit of thinking? No doubt the person will feel a high ardor for moral qualities, actions and characters of a certain kind and order: He will express great admiration of them, and on some occasions he will exhibit them in his conduct: But the more private and less showy virtues, will excite in him little ardor or admiration: Vanity, self-conceit and contempt of others, will secretly mingle with his best actions, and even break out in some degree, and in some instances. As self-love and self-will, have not been subdued, by impressions and habits of humility, they will transgress their just bounds, and keep the man, in some degree, under the dominion

dominion of selfish and unfriendly passions. Several real and important virtues will be very weak, or intirely wanting, such as piety, equity of disposition, moderation of mind in prosperity, patience in adversity, and contentment with his condition and lot in life. And thus the character becomes very mixed and imperfect. He will indeed on some occasions put the more splendid kind of virtues in practice, but these will be only like jets of water from a muddy and corrupted well, which tho' they appear clear and bright, by the reflexion of the sun-beams while they pass thro' the air, yet they really carry along with them, a mixture of the mud and corruption of the bottom, from which they were rais'd. Thus I hope it appears, that it is a matter of real importance, that we inculcate the morality of the gospel, on the principles of the gospel, and in the manner and order it directs.

Time will not allow me to treat more particularly the importance of enforcing the moral duties of life, from the peculiar motives Divine Revelation suggests. Let us study human nature, and study the doctrines of the Gospel, and we shall find that they tally to one another. And as, in this study, we shall be employed in that way which our duty and the propriety of our character requires, so we shall find the true sources of Christian oratory will open themselves to our view.

To conclude, let us who are the Ministers of the Gospel, beware of satisfying ourselves, with admiring and extolling the excellency of the Gospel morality; but let it be our chief care, to copy the perfect pattern of our great Master, in all the virtues of his life, and especially in that meekness and humility which he exemplified in the character of

an instructor, and has enjoined us to imitate in the same character. *Learn of me*, says he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart.* He manifested the full power of this blessed disposition, in that unruffled sweetness and mildness, with which he bore the slowness of understanding, the unbelief, and the many weaknesses of his own disciples, as well as all the outrages and provocations of his most inveterate enemies. As meekness ought to adorn our whole behaviour, so it should particularly shine forth in our public, and even in our private instructions. A small degree of acquaintance with the world, and of insight into human nature, will convince us that every thing unfriendly, every thing biting and satirical, every tincture of the sour and angry passions appearing in our sentiments, our words, or even our manner and gesture; as it is contrary to the meek spirit of the Gospel and its author, so it must hurt the good effect of the best instructions we can give; *Instruct*, says the Apostle, *those who oppose themselves in meekness.* Let us be particularly careful to cherish kind, friendly and candid thoughts and designs towards our brethren; and keep at the utmost distance from all ungenerous, or unjust insinuations, which tend to lessen their character or usefulness: Let us always be so much on our guard as never to speak a word, or write a line, that can mark the least departure from the kind, meek and candid spirit of our holy religion: If we are not, the more discerning part of mankind, at least, will conclude, that our hearts must be under very bad discipline, when we cannot, during the time of the composition, or delivery of a sermon, suppress the workings of the little, the selfish, and party passions: Besides, they will be apt to say, and not without some



some foundation, that tho' the speaker or writer intended, indeed, only to draw a picture of others, not at all to their advantage, yet he hath really drawn a truer and blacker one of his own heart.

In like manner, let us imitate the humility of our great Master : In order to this, we must watch over our own tempers, lest we insensibly set too great a value on our station, our parts, our learning or labours ; and at the same time, we must watch over our behaviour, so that true humility may discover itself in our intercourse with all ranks of men, the lowest as well as the highest, As the lower classes of men must always compose the greatest part of the body of mankind, whom we are called to instruct ; if we contemn those for whom our instructions and labours are principally designed, we can never discharge our duty to them with faithfulness or success. It ought further to be considered, that our humility ought to appear in the manner in which we hold and deliver our sentiments and opinions. There is a pulpit modesty, which is very beautiful and engaging ; as there is a pulpit pride, extremely disagreeable and disgusting : Nothing can make a more odious appearance than pride preaching up humility, and a man describing himself as exceeding little, when it plainly appears he has an idea of himself as exceeding great. In order to preserve a proper modesty as to our notions and sentiments about things of doubtful disputation, and the circumstances of religion, and to abate that positiveness in our own way, which is so opposite to real humility, and which leads us to complain of the pride of other men's understandings, when there is no other reason for the charge, than that they cannot adopt our notions or phrases ; let us seriously ask ourselves  
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the following questions. Can I pretend to a clearer understanding, to a more diligent and impartial inquiry into revelation, or to greater degrees of Divine illumination, than all others who differ in opinion from me? What grounds have I to imagine I am in the full possession of all divine truths? Do I not acknowledge that I may err? What security then have I that I do not actually err, in some instances, amidst the multitude of opinions which I hold? May I not be in a mistake, nay, in many mistakes, tho' I am not conscious of the particular instances? Is there not ground to expect that the admission into the regions of perfect light, will prove not only an enlargement, but a correction of former views, to men of the wisest, best, and fairest minds? Such questions seriously put, and urged upon our own consciences, in silence and retirement, and under the awful impression of the presence of the Great Searcher of hearts, would naturally check that presumptuous confidence, that our own particular views are certainly right, which is so common in the world, and so frequently accompanied with that *wrath of man, which never works the righteousness of God*. Such serious soliloquies, would lead us to suspect, that we are departing from the meekness and humility of the Gospel spirit, when we allow ourselves to think, and to speak hardly of others, because they do not see every thing just in the same light with us, or have not freedom to express themselves in our phrases, which are perhaps not only unscriptural, but were unknown in the Christian Church for many centuries, and can claim no better, nor higher original, than the dregs of the Scholastic Philosophy. There may be phrases not strictly Scriptural, which must be acknowledged

acknowledged to be venerable by their hoary antiquity; but even these ought not to be too much urged upon honest and tender minds. May what has been said have its due weight and influence upon all of us.

We now conclude the whole with the Apostolic direction, *Let us meditate on these things, let us give ourselves wholly to them, that our profiting may appear unto all: Let us take heed unto ourselves, and to our doctrine, continuing in them; for in so doing, we shall save ourselves, and them that hear us.*

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acknowledged to be variable by their hourly antipathy; but even these ought not to be too much urged upon honest and tender minds. May what has been said have its due weight and influence upon all of us. We now consider the whole with the Apostolic direction, Let us maintain in these things, let us give ourselves wholly to them, that our profession may appear unto all: Let us take heed unto ourselves, and to our doctrine, continuing in them; for in so doing, we shall have our reward, and then that fear us.

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